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SARAH'S LETTER TO ANN.

Sarah's letter to Ann, which gives an account of what we, Sarah, Jenni and I talked about when we were together for three days in my house and made a tape. We also offered food to the Indonesian monk who is in the Hague, and had lunch afterwards with my Indian friend and her Tibetan mother, where we continued our discussions. My Indian friend wanted to know more about nāma and rūpa, since she was reading Book I.

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This Sarah's letter:

... The discussions proved most helpful and most valuable. There was much emphasis on daily life, our very different accumulations, for doing such different things and doing what we want to do without worrying and feeling guilty about it. Sati can arise at any time, as there are always realities arising wherever we are whatever we are doing. We think we should be having dhamma discussions all the time or should have done more reading, but there are accumulations and conditions for doing other things and although the dhamma discussions can be so useful and helpful as we know, there can also be sati at the other times. It is best to be aware right now. It does not help to try and 'force' ourselves to do certain things hoping for more awareness. This is wrong practice. When we were in the woods, discussing conditions and accumulations, I was also thinking of the beautiful trees and wanted to pick up some leaves to press and this is natural. Even while discussing there is seeing, visible object, hardness and other realities appearing through the six doors.

We also discussed best ways to help and explain Dhamma to others. The frustrations, aversions and feelings of loneliness arise so often, and the wanting to 'corner someone' and of course the conceit. I found it useful to try and redefine the terms we use so loosely without really questioning our own understanding of them. Having to explain about realities to others can provide so many useful reminders of our own ignorance. Again talking about the Dhamma on a conceptual level is so different from clearly realising and understanding the realities as they arise now. While Nina was driving me to Hook of Holland she was saying how often we take thinking of awareness for awareness itself. Often we think we clearly know and understand nāma and rūpa, but really have so little understanding of what the characteristics are when they appear. There are so many rapidly succeeding realities which we confuse together. We think we know what painful bodily feeling is, but there are so many realities

arising which we take for painful bodily feeling, that how can we possibly know what painful bodily feeling is yet? The more sati arises, the more awareness there is of how much ignorance there is. I felt depressed but Nina stressed that instead it should encourage us. Sati can only arise with a kusala citta, so there is no need for depression. When we think that we understand clearly and know everything there is no awareness.

(I want to add: I meant: when we see what we do not know it is a degree of paññā and when there is understanding there cannot be at the same time depression or discouragement. It is helpful to know what you do not know, so, how can that depress? Nina.)

... We also discussed our enthusiasm for the Dhamma. Nina said she thought she was too enthusiastic and this is lobha. (I mean: mostly enthusiasm arises with lobha, and not often with kusala citta, because there are many times more akusala cittas than kusala cittas. This again is not depressing, but the truth. Nina.)

... Sometimes the Dhamma seems so important to us, but the enthusiasm can have an adverse effect on those near and dear to us. (Yes, our attachment makes us want the other to be like us, and then we insist too much that he will study Dhamma more. And so often we are enthusiastic about a concept of the Dhamma we have, and it is enthusiasm which accompanies lobha. Nina.)

Nina said I never know who I might meet on the boat, and I have just met an old friend which is nice. He is very interested to hear about my stay with Nina and about the discussions, and says he is so pleased to hear about developing awareness in daily life. He had been interested in Zen meditation but hadn't been able to come to terms with still wanting to go out for a drink and his other daily activities. So he was relieved to hear that it is so natural to want to do these things and that sati can arise during these times as well. I told him that Nina was a very active person, too, and held large dinner parties and that we went shopping and walking together. There is no right thing or wrong thing to do because sati can arise at any time. (Sarah does not mean here akusala kamma, of course.) Even if we go out for a drink there is seeing and visible object and so many other realities rapidly following each other. I gave the friend some of Nina's literature and he was very appreciative. We never know when there may be a good opportunity for discussing the Dhamma, and we never know who will be interested. If we think that some people are not Dhamma friends and not interested this may be a condition for there to be no Dhamma discussion.... (I used to be disappointed, now I better understand, this is life. Nina.)